

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 09929 006 4

No. 10

CHARITY ORGANIZATION.

ADDRESS

OF

ROBERT TREAT PAINE, JR.,

PRESIDENT OF

THE ASSOCIATED CHARITIES OF BOSTON.

*Delivered at the Charity Building, Chardon Street, March 12, 1879,
at a Meeting called to explain and discuss the Principles of the
new Society, of which the Provisional Constitution
had been adopted February 26, 1879.*

ADDRESS.

I AM unwilling to say a word in favor of the new plan until I have first expressed the feelings which I share with all the citizens of Boston,—the respect and admiration due so justly to the noble private charities of this city. They have long done, and never better than now, wise and faithful work among the poor, because they have been and are led, now as always, by men of sagacity and devotion. The work of the overseers of the poor deserves the respect of us all for its admirable system, thoroughness of visitation, completeness of records, and the wise rules by which relief is given. Meantime the population of the city has grown into great proportions. The numbers of the needy rise into the thousands. Pauperism proudly rears its head, and almost asks to be admitted, like a new State into the Union, with full rights. We learn that gratuitous relief, though enough in quantity, is not elevating; that unwise relief does harm; and that excessive relief pauperizes not only the recipient, but all his neighbors and neighbors' children. The problem, How to relieve the needy and to repress pauperism, grows too tremendous for any one society. So we see many societies at work, each in its own way: till at last the need is evident of joint effort by an associated combination of them all, to avoid conflict and overlapping, and to use more largely the energies of all the good people in the city. A few points at the outset should be made very plain:—

First. Each society will remain, of course, as independent as ever. No limitation upon its independence is proposed or wished. It will work in the future precisely as in the past,—giving the same relief, by the same agents, and to the same needs, save only as in any case it may otherwise decide.

Secondly. Each society will come into this new plan just so far—and so far only, and just in such manner and subject to such limitations—as it may from time to time think wise. Of course, we

hope that experience will so prove the wisdom and helpfulness of our plan and work that all societies will be led to a full co-operation. They must judge.

Thirdly. Let us dispel at once and forever the idea that this is a new relief society. This society will give no relief. It will have no funds for that purpose. Its visitors will give nothing from the society — nor of their own — subject to the exception which overrules all law, of absolute and immediate suffering. And even this exception must substantially disappear when the new plan of work is put in practice. The further exception, "on consultation with their committee," and what that means, and how it will work, we will consider later.

THE AIM OF THIS SOCIETY IS TO RAISE THE NEEDY ABOVE THE NEED OF RELIEF, BUT NOT TO GIVE ALMS.

If, then, the giving of relief is not, what is the great object of this society? I wish I could emphasize it so that hereafter no man could doubt it. We aim not at the mere relief of need, but to elevate the needy out of and above their need. Not temporary alleviation, but permanent cure. Not by offering money, but by putting men at work. Not by feeding them while idle, but by insisting upon industry. Not by encouraging beggary, but by enforcing thrift. Let no boy or girl grow up a pauper. School first; then work, aiming at skill; and all under constant watching. If now we agree that not more relief, but wiser relief, after more thorough visitation, and, if possible, less relief, be the thing to aim at; if the elevation of the needy out of and above their need is a yet grander aim, — can it be accomplished? and how far? and by what means? Is it a mere dream of hope and fancy? Or may business men put into it the same energy and sagacity and indomitable will, which in our private affairs command success? Put this into the hands of idle dreamers, and it may all prove an empty dream. If men will take up this work who have been tried in the fire of life and have proved their fitness in affairs, — aided by wise and loving women, — who will fix the limits of the work, powerful for good? Boston is full of wealth, energy, and love, all ready to give and work and help. Nothing is needed but organization and guidance. Nor is this movement a new experiment. London has risen in its might to grapple with its vast army of the poor, and has organized more than a score of branches of this same society all through the city and its suburbs, working by ways adapted to their needs and existing agencies, but on a scheme substantially like this.

THE BUFFALO ASSOCIATION.

Let me say a few words about Buffalo, which I have recently visited on purpose to see and learn their mode of work. Buffalo has in the last eighteen months studied, started, organized, and got well along on the path of perfection, the same system which we seek here. Their central system was started eighteen months ago, and the district and ward conferences four months ago, on Nov. 15. The central office aims at complete registration, receiving reports daily from their poor-masters (our overseers of the poor) and from the district offices, recording everything in three books,—a method not so convenient as our plan of cards,—reporting at once all cases of overlapping, that is, aid given by different sources to the same case. The districts in the city do not follow ward lines but police precincts,—eight in all; but so far they have only four district conferences. Each has its local office, and a paid visitor giving his whole time, living if possible in the house above,—the lower floor, two rooms opening together, being the office. The front room is used by the agent; and the rear room, separated by a rail, is used by the committees, or for any purpose. The cost being, for visiting-agent and office, about \$60 monthly, not over \$800 a year, including everything. Every applicant for aid is to apply at the district office, and citizens are urged, and are learning to send, every applicant there first: so that street-begging has well-nigh ceased. The agent takes his or her whole story, recording it in the applicant book, containing full information as to family, children, school, wages, work, references, church, rent, arrears of rent, how long out of work, why discharged, who is or was their employer and the causes of their discharge, the causes of their need of relief,—full, complete, and exact information. Printed blanks are ready for the agent to send to the employer and also to the references, asking all information which they can give. Replies come almost always, and very full. All information is recorded in a large record book in the district office, on two pages devoted to the name of each applicant.

Twice a week the district conference meet, consult, and act on all new and all deferred cases. I was present at the meetings of two of these conferences. Ten business men met at the first district at five P. M., and in seventy minutes had considered and acted on every case. The record of a case is read: the agent is there to answer questions. The decision in each case is the best which ten

good men can make. Case one is a widow with three young children, worthy, industrious, out of work, can sew or wash, gets aid of city. One of the committee agrees to send a lady to visit, and, if possible, find sewing, and report. If sewing can be found, the need of relief ceases. Case two is a woman, sick, with children, worthy, and supports herself when well; has never received aid of city; and it is very important that she should not get on the poor books, and learn to rely on city aid. A member of the committee will send a lady almoner to visit and give aid until she is well. Case three is a woman, lazy and fond of begging, but able to work. A visitor is sent to her with special instructions not to give aid, but to tone her up and make her work. Case four is an able-bodied man, who comes in winters to the city to live on his wits by ingenuous begging. A suitable visitor looks him up, and lets him know he will be prosecuted and shut up in the workhouse. And so on. In each case the best decision, on their best judgment, after brief consultation. Visitors are not selected at hap-hazard, nor sent blindly. But, in each case, the visitor best adapted to handle that case, and with special instructions about the case and what to do; that is, be sure not to aid, or to aid judiciously while sickness lasts; or to furnish work, if possible; or to get them out of a bad neighborhood or tenement; or to tone up one who is demoralized; or to encourage one who is struggling against drink; in every case to make him more of a man, her more of a woman, and especially to look after the children. Not mere relief or more relief, but real help, wise counsel, friendly visits, elevation of the man or woman, and, above all, guarding, wherever possible, the boys and girls from growing up into paupers. Pauperism is a vast army. Cut off the recruits. Stop the sources of supply. Every boy or girl saved from growing up a pauper is a great gain to us,—how much more to themselves!

Yes, in this spirit, working to this end, full of this faith, Buffalo has buckled on its whole armor for the fight,—not merely to relieve, but to remove pauperism. Her best business men have taken it up strongly. The president of the charity-organization society is the president of a great steamboat company, sending almost daily a steamer up the lakes; and the same energy and wisdom guide the charity which direct the business. The people are giving it their cordial support. The churches are furnishing visitors in good numbers, though by no means all that are wanted. The newspapers are eager to aid, publish full reports, publish

weekly and without charge a bulletin of cases (without names) where work or aid or anything in special is desired. The response which private charity gives to any such public appeal is prompt and large. Why, ladies and gentlemen, we do not begin to realize the volcanic power for good which lies dormant in this people, all ready to be evoked into life and work, in any good cause, by the mighty agency of the public press. The success, the cordiality, the devotion, with which the best men and women in Buffalo have started and have now in full career her organization of charities, deeply impressed me with surprise and admiration. They hardly realize themselves how grandly they are doing. May I not send to Buffalo to-night, in the name of Boston, a few words of cheer and greeting?

THE PROPOSED WORK IN BOSTON.

Now, then, for Boston, where the problem is different,—harder, because the city is so much larger, the numbers of the needy so much more numerous, and pauperism has got a tighter grip on us,—easier, because we have our superb private charities, pouring out relief with a free hand to every kind of need. The system is the same in theory here as there. The new plan must start carefully, feel its way cautiously ahead, guided by experience, listening to the suggestions of the great relief-giving societies, especially asking the co-operative aid and advice of the city, through the mayor and the overseers of the poor. Registration and the ward conferences,—registration in the centre, ward conferences working in the districts. Registration aims to give notice of all double aid to the same case,—not that double aid is always wrong, but it should always be with knowledge. Registration means “notice to quit” to all professional tramps. Boston shall no longer be a nest so soft and warm for idle tramps to winter in. Not that we would drive them to other towns, but in the hope that all other towns may work to the same end, so that tramping may become a lost art. Registration, even more, means that the worth of worthy need shall be carefully investigated and recorded, so that wise relief may be fittingly and surely given. Without registration charity invites fraud. The kindest heart is the easiest victim to the well-conned tale of woe. One poor widow learned so well the art to do it, that nineteen times she buried her poor husband—if she ever had one at all—always at Worcester, asking and getting each time large aid in her distress. Misplaced charity is a mischief both to giver and receiver.

Wisely and lovingly given, charity falls like the dews of heaven, blessing both giver and receiver, it is hard to tell which most ; but, given indiscriminately, it fosters the pauperism it is meant to relieve.

Picture for a moment the return of the professional mendicant, laden with booty, into the same tenement-house where other men and women are working hard and earning less. What influence can be worse for all who see that begging pays better than work? for the beggar and the worker, for adults, and especially for the young? How quick children are to see, how eager to compare! What worse poison can taint the blood of boys and girls, when their character, like wax, is to receive the stamp, to last perhaps through life, than the belief that begging prospers while honest industry is cold and hungry?

Probably all of you in this hall have one or more families which you privately aid, not through any society, but in your own way. Perhaps you will each exclaim against our request that you register all this aid, as needless, because you feel you know the facts as to the family you aid. But among the four hundred cases thus relieved, some at least deceive (though each of us may say "Not mine"), how many no one can tell. Shall we say one-quarter? Then, even of our cases, perhaps one hundred get double or triple aid by lying. Who, then, can measure the amount of overlapping aid given in the whole city to the same mendicants? Who can count the number of families which get aid from different sources? These are the prizes of the mendicant art. But it is the prizes which fill a profession full. It is the prizes which lead men to a lottery in spite of the multitude of blanks. Nothing can remove the curse of mendicancy but complete registration. Take away the prizes, and you may hope to empty the profession. Go on giving, and refuse to register, and rogues will still find it pay to ply their art, not much to your loss, but enough to their gain to make them train up their children, and, worse yet, their neighbors' children, in the same sad career. Why should any one hesitate to register all aid he gives? Registration is not open to all—not public. It is sacredly confidential, only to be used by those wishing to aid a given person, or to discover cases of double relief. If you register aid to a man, and state that you give him all needed aid, the only reply to any inquiry about that man will be that he needs no aid; but you are notified that your client has been seeking relief of another person, whose name you receive. To sum up, registration

makes aid to the worthy poor more sure ; closes the door to impostors ; is a "notice to quit" to tramps ; and aims to make mendicancy so unprofitable that boys and girls will not be tempted into the same trade. Blanks will soon be sent through the city for all to fill up and return. They are distributed through the hall for each person to carry home and fill up, and send to the registration office, room No. 38.

So much for the central registration. Now for the real work all through the city. The ward or district conferences will work each in its own territory. Each may be composed of a dozen, more or less, good men and women. It will aim to bring the visitors of the different relief-giving societies into mutual acquaintance with each other, and their ways and works, so that intelligent co-operation may replace conflict and competition and overlapping. A district conference should have one good representative, man or woman, of each church in the district, whose duty and delight it should be to learn and know what ladies and gentlemen in the parish can be relied on for friendly visitation ; also one or more of the visitors of each relief-giving society, — the Provident, St. Vincent de Paul, Howard, Young Men's Benevolent Society, and especially a visitor of the overseers of the poor ; and also a few other interested men and women. Meeting once a week, more or less, as they find needful, discussing each case briefly, learning all about it, with all the information from the overseers of the poor, Provident, and any other society which knows. Probably in nine cases out of ten the relief will be left to go on as before. In cases of double relief, or overlapping, all may find it wise that one society should give all the relief, though this may perhaps be impossible, and each society may prefer to give its own relief by its own hand. Each will at least work with knowledge of what the others are doing. If a conference asks you to go to any such family as a friendly visitor, and you can find or furnish work, you notify the visitor of the Provident, or whoever is giving the relief, that the man or woman is earning money, and the need of relief has ceased. You have supplemented the relief work of that society which had charge of giving relief to that poor family in the best way. For the time that family is raised out of pauperism into independence, — out of the slough of beggary into self-respect. No matter whether relief be given or not, cull out every case where a friendly visitor can be of any help, not to give relief, but to build a family in any way into a better life.

THE GREAT WORK FOR FRIENDLY VISITORS.

Here, at last, the work for the city to do looms up in grand proportions. This is the work of absorbing interest. The call is not on our purse or pocket. The best thought of to-day proclaims through the civilized world that money is impotent to deal with the great problem of pauperism. It is not this society, it is not any society, which can itself do the work. Nothing will avail but the earnest co-operation of all good men and women, who know the need, and hear the cry, and are ready to respond, each devoting a little of his time and thought and love to helping up one or two of those who are down. You who are strong, give some of your strength to those who are weak. You who are well, take of your health into the chambers of sickness. You who love industry, teach it to the idle. You, in your strength of character, steady the stumbling. You who know the infinite value of a child's life, watch over the boy or girl exposed to danger, and try to keep them safe. You whose homes are radiant with joy, take some of the sunshine of heaven into the gloom of the needy. The relation thus formed may last till the need is over—better still, till the family have developed into independence—best of all, if the friendly relations last through life.

These are the objects for which the new society invokes the aid of what is called “a corps of friendly visitors.” And yet, after the picture I have drawn, does not the word “visitor” jar on your mind? The lack in the English language of a fit word to express the new idea, is a serious hinderance to our work. How can we explain our ideas without words, or, rather, if the only words we have suggest such an erroneous thought that those oppose who would otherwise favor? Patron suggests patronage. Client smacks of law. Visitor is formal, technical, temporary, trivial. I am prepared to offer a large reward for the right word. Unless we can find it, I am not sure that a persistent refusal by the public to understand what we aim at will not drive us to abandon it in despair. I said the English tongue had no word. The right word in an unknown tongue would be a godsend to us, and the harder the word the better. It would set the whole city puzzling out its meaning, and very soon the exact idea would get understood and known. Dispel at the outset the fear that this great corps of twenty-five hundred visitors are to be let loose to commit indiscriminate charity on a suffering city. That would indeed sow the seeds of pauperism with an

open hand. No visitor is to go anywhere on his or her own motion, nor to follow his or her own judgment in giving relief. Everything must start with a deliberate vote of the district conference. They must select the visitor, as wisely as they can, who is best suited to each case. Inform him or her of the nature of the case, and what objects to work for. In most cases our friendly visitors must go under peremptory orders not to give any money or physical relief. Wherever man, woman, or youth, can work and will not, or cannot find work, or is in temporary trouble, or spends in drink what would otherwise support the family, our rules cannot be too rigid, that gratuitous relief, so far as necessary, should come from the relief-giving societies who have been dealing with the case, or through the agency of the conference only after a special vote, which should in every such case aim at the permanent elevation of that family even more than at present relief. In almost all such cases, not only must the visitor be prohibited from giving any money, but must be made to understand that money aid may do more harm than good. It may help the family downwards. Only an expert can judge just what and how much to give, and be sure not to encourage thriftlessness or idleness or beggary. Charity must often seem a little cruel, if it would be truly kind. In all these cases visitors may find much to do for the children and the mother, in counsel or sympathy, and especially finding work. After friendly relations have been formed between any gentleman or lady and a needy family, especially if they take the whole care of them, relief, when needed, may be given with less danger and more judgment. Probably the supervision of this society, as well as the relief of all the relief-giving societies, would have long ceased.

There is also a class of cases where relief is needed in large measure, and can do no harm,—where death has taken away the father, leaving a mother unable to support a large family of children; where long sickness cuts off all support; where old age asks a little comfort; and where orphans are to be reared. Surely nothing can be more welcome to the overseers of the poor, or the Provident, or whatever society has felt the burden of such relief, than to have some kind family assume the whole care and visiting and guidance and relief. How many men and women are there in Boston of ample means and ready to relieve any such distress, whenever the facts are known! All they want is to know exactly where the need is, who are really worthy, and how to help wisely. Why cannot our district conferences bring these two classes to-

gether? Make lists of all who are ready to stand in this relation of relief, advice, and love ; and give them, with wise instructions, the chance to help those in extreme need. I do not know or care whether a lady or gentleman assuming this relation to a poor family would be called a visitor. If they are, then this is the exception provided for in our plan of work. This relief would be given, after a vote of the conference, with full knowledge of the visitor of the society which had previously given relief, — no doubt with his cordial approval, probably on his suggestion.

Where are all these visitors, to visit but not give relief, to come from? If we could call the roll of Boston, surely there would be enough. Every church must find all (of their own number) who are ready to work. Especially let each district conference search out all in their immediate district who will help. Many a family, not rich enough to give money, can give wise and helpful supervision and counsel, and perhaps find work for some needy neighbor. Let no one think all these visitors would be wise or fit. Far from it. Some, indeed many, are already trained ; others would learn ; others might never be fit. Tenderness, tact, and true sympathy every visitor should have, together with all other good gifts of an Octavia Hill. The rules to guide volunteer visitation must be most carefully prepared, to guard against harm and to insure the most good. Gather up and study the experience and wisdom of the old societies. Experience will show what new means to adopt and what old means to omit. Probably we shall soon feel the need and see the wisdom of having a few local offices, with a few paid visitors devoting their whole time,—experts not only in the art of getting at the truth of need, but even more in knowing ways of work, shops and factories, and the great employers of labor ; experts in counselling men and women, and in dealing with youth. These offices would be local centres of information, useful to all the societies and all their visitors, especially in finding work for old and young,—a thing we all so often wish to do, but without experience we can so rarely accomplish. Can we not, in large measure, avail of the well-trained visitors of the overseers of the poor for the exact knowledge of each family which we wish before the conference selects and sends a friendly visitor? We cannot forget that the various sections of the city proper and suburbs have different needs, different existing agencies, and may wish to work in this society in different ways. Experience only can show how each need can be best met. It is evident that the suburbs must

work under a system allowing and encouraging relief until other relief-giving societies exist.

The plan is not rigid, but very elastic. Adapt it to the work. After a brief time of trial, put it in such better shape as we can. The coldest science and the warmest charity unite in demanding more than mere physical relief. Carry it too far, and aid a man so often or so unwisely as to sap his manhood, his self-respect, his self-reliance,—and charity has left a curse where it came to bless. Better, infinitely better than all this, is the counsel, love, and help which seek to rescue from pauperism each man or woman or child who is in or near that slough of despond, and plant them again on firm land.

Oh, that our words could ring,—by some great telephone,—as our influence must enter, in the home of every working man and woman in all Boston, and teach temperance, industry, skill, and thrift. These four are the cure of their woes and wants. Each one is powerful: united, they are irresistible. Without temperance, all is in vain. Industry earns enough to keep any man or woman out of want. Add skill, and the product or wages—the same thing—may be increased one or five fold. And then thrift! Let a man take one good step in the path of saving, with the firm purpose to get ahead, and we have got him and his wife and children on our side, perhaps for good. Temperance for the corner-stone. Industry, to keep steadily at work. Skill, to make the product large. Thrift, to save a fair share of it. These are the four great magicians of modern magic. Let them wave their mighty wands over any town, and a transformation follows fairer than ever met Aladdin's eye. Happy homes owned by those who live in them, hands always busy, wages large, and thrift building all up into independence!

